

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 15, 2004

**LOS ANGELES RIVER GREENWAY
CORNFIELD/TAYLOR YARD**

File No. 04-073
Project Manager: Christopher Kroll

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$1,900,000 for planning and technical studies for the Cornfield and Taylor Yard State Parks.

LOCATION: Los Angeles River, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County (see Exhibit 1).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement/Public Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Project Location Map

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31251-31270 and 31400-31405 of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one million nine hundred thousand dollars (\$1,900,000) for preparation of planning and technical studies for the Taylor Yard and Cornfield State Park sites near the Los Angeles River, and for reimbursement of the California Department of Parks and Recreation for related planning costs incurred after June 30, 2004.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, specifically Chapter 6 (Sections 31251-31270) regarding enhancement of coastal resources, and Chapter 9 (Sections 31400-31405) regarding public access to and along the coast.
 2. The proposed authorization is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The Conservancy has been involved in planning for the Los Angeles River greenway since the early 1990s. The focus of Conservancy involvement has been habitat restoration and improved trail connections to the coast. The proposed action is disbursement and utilization of \$1.9 million for planning and technical services for the Cornfield and Taylor Yard project sites of the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) along the Los Angeles River Greenway in the City of Los Angeles.

The Conservancy and State Parks entered into an interagency agreement in June 2004, making \$1.9 million of State Parks' funds available to the Conservancy for planning purposes. Under the agreement, the Conservancy and State Parks will collaborate on planning for the two large park sites, which, when completed, will create a 100-acre park along the Los Angeles River and link downtown Los Angeles to the river. These two parks will be the geographic heart of the Los Angeles River Greenway, a series of parks and open space, which ultimately will extend more than 50 miles from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean at Long Beach. State Parks has requested Conservancy assistance based on the Conservancy's general long-term interest and involvement in Los Angeles River restoration and, specifically, the Conservancy's past preparation of a restoration feasibility study for Taylor Yard. State Parks would take the lead role overseeing the general planning process required for new park units, cultural/interpretive planning, and conceptual design. The Conservancy would oversee further planning for Taylor Yard and regional planning/connectivity to analyze linkages/trail connections for both sites with each other, other regional parks and trails, and the California Coastal Trail (via the Los Angeles River).

Over the years, the Conservancy has produced two strategic reports (habitat/recreation project opportunities and wetland profiles/restoration opportunities) regarding the Los Angeles River, and has funded several conceptual plans/feasibility studies and three acquisitions. Local governments and nonprofit organizations are now pursuing implementation of several of these projects. The Conservancy has also worked collaboratively with other state agencies on Los Angeles River projects, including the Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. The proposed authorization would be the Conservancy's first collaboration with State Parks on a river project. State Parks has

begun a coordinated, community-based planning effort for both Taylor Yard and Cornfield. An intent of the planning effort is to link the two properties together as part of the larger Los Angeles River Greenway. Initial conceptual planning efforts have been completed but more detailed planning and technical work is now needed. This collaboration is a logical next step considering the Conservancy's prior involvement with initial planning for Taylor Yard and long-time interest in habitat restoration along the river.

State Parks approached Conservancy staff earlier this year to discuss a role for the Conservancy in the next phase of planning for the two parks. The Executive Officer agreed to accept the \$1.9 million from State Parks through the interagency agreement and to manage the planning effort pending expenditure authority from the Conservancy. Under the proposed authorization, the Conservancy will accomplish some of the tasks through contractors; other tasks will be accomplished by State Parks itself through its technical staff at the Southern Service Center in San Diego. State Parks has already begun, and will be reimbursed for work undertaken after June 30, 2004.

Project planning efforts to be completed include:

- Compiling and analyzing background information on relevant physical, political, economic and historical/cultural aspects of the sites. Examining and analyzing land use planning studies and regional connectivity including the relationship of one site to the other; their relationship to the Los Angeles River and to the other planning efforts such as the Los Angeles River Bikeway and Greenway, the County of Los Angeles' Los Angeles River Master Plan, the Arroyo Seco Bikeway Plan and relevant pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns.
- Examining water quality issues as they relate to on-site drainage including run-off retention/percolation and to off-site influences and impacts to the Los Angeles River.
- Enhancing public awareness and implementing public outreach programs to promote public interest and support of both projects and to encourage public and agency participation with the planning efforts.
- Developing park design programs for both sites including feasibility studies, land use plans, physical design concepts, interpretive plans, cultural resources management plans, natural habitat restoration strategy and public use plans.

Site Description: Taylor Yard and the Cornfield were both former maintenance yards for the Southern Pacific Transportation Company. Both sites are also historically linked to the founding and development of the City of Los Angeles. Taylor Yard is located in a gently sloping river valley known as the Glendale Narrows, two miles north of downtown Los Angeles. At an average elevation of 350 feet above mean sea level, Taylor Yard forms a natural pass connecting the San Fernando Valley to the Los Angeles Coastal Plain. The pass is created by the Elysian Park Hills, which form the southern tip of the Santa Monica Mountains, and the Repetto Hills. The Glendale Narrows portion of the

river has a “soft” river bottom, one of three such areas on the river without a concrete river bottom. The soft bottom portion of the river adjacent to Taylor Yard is a mix of sediments, boulders, and cobbles, allowing riparian vegetation to grow, providing habitat for birds, benthic invertebrates, and fish. Griffith Park, which is located at the northern end of the Glendale Narrows, enhances the ecological value of this soft-bottomed stretch of the river. The park provides upland habitat for many of the bird species that frequent the river. A study by the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History notes the occurrence the over 100 species of birds in the vicinity of Taylor Yard.

The Cornfield site is located in the Chinatown district north of downtown Los Angeles. The site is a relatively flat 32-acre property located between North Spring Street and North Broadway. Solano Canyon, Chavez Ravine, Dodger Stadium, and Elysian Park surround the property on the north and west. The Zanja Madre (mother ditch), which ran along the northern boundary of the Cornfield, was the main water line bringing water from the river to the earliest Spanish community in Los Angeles, El Pueblo de Los Angeles. The River Station, the first transcontinental railroad station and freight yard in Los Angeles, was established at the Cornfield in the 1870s.

Project History:

In October 1998, the Conservancy funded a study focusing on the feasibility of a multi-objective flood control and wetland restoration project at Taylor Yard. The *Taylor Yard Multiple Objective Feasibility Study*, completed in June 2002, identified four alternatives that included flood storage, habitat restoration, recreation, water treatment, and environmental education. In 1999, State Parks received an appropriation from the Legislature to develop a Los Angeles River Parkway. In 2001, State Parks purchased its first piece of the future state park, 40-acre Parcel D at Taylor Yard. State Parks acquired the Cornfield in 2001 and Taylor Yard Parcel G1 in 2003.

PROJECT FINANCING:

\$1,900,000 (ultimately from State Parks’ Proposition 12 funds)

The anticipated source of Conservancy funds is the “California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood parks, and Coastal Protection Act of 2002” (Proposition 40). The Conservancy will be reimbursed in full by State Parks under the interagency agreement, through an appropriation from the “Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000” (Proposition 12).

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Public Resources Code Section 31111 states that the Conservancy “may fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies, and may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for these purposes.” Consistent with this section, this authorization would allow the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and

nonprofit organizations for the next phase of planning and technical studies for Taylor Yard and Cornfield.

Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Sections 31251 *et seq.*) provides for the Coastal Conservancy's participation in a program of coastal resource enhancement. The proposed authorization would facilitate the further study of wetland and riparian habitat restoration at Taylor Yard. The Conservancy completed a conceptual restoration feasibility study for Taylor Yard in 2002. This authorization would allow the Conservancy, in partnership with State Parks, to carry the conceptual planning forward to more developed alternatives.

Consistent with Section 31251, the proposed authorization would allow the Conservancy to award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations to assist in planning habitat restoration and water quality improvements to remedy the loss of natural and scenic values because of human activities. Any improvements that result from this authorization will enhance the natural and scenic character of Taylor Yard and/or Cornfield and will benefit coastal resources.

Consistent with Section 31251.2, the Los Angeles River watershed is partly within and partly outside the coastal zone, and the proposed authorization would address habitat restoration and urban runoff issues both of which could improve water quality in the coastal zone.

Consistent with Section 31253, the Conservancy may provide up to the total of the cost of any coastal resource enhancement project. The proposed authorization would allow the Conservancy, using Proposition 12 funding from State Parks, to fund the resource enhancement elements of planning for Cornfield and Taylor Yard.

Chapter 9 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Section 31400 *et seq.*) provides for the Conservancy's participation in the development of a system of public accessways. Consistent with Sections 31400 and 31409, identification of regional trail linkages to the Los Angeles River and the California Coastal Trail would be a major focus of the Conservancy's involvement in planning for the Cornfield and Taylor Yard. The Los Angeles River has a series of trails south of downtown Los Angeles, which can be used to get to the California Coastal Trail in Long Beach. These trails do not presently extend as far upriver as Cornfield and Taylor Yard. An important component of the proposed authorization is determining what the regional trail linkages will be to connect these two sites ultimately to the Coastal Trail. The proposed authorization would enable the Conservancy to provide assistance to State Parks to establish and expand inland trail systems that may be linked to the Coastal Trail.

Consistent with Section 31400.2, the Conservancy may provide funding for the initial development of public accessways by any public agency or nonprofit organization. The proposed authorization would enable the Conservancy to fund planning for the regional trail linkages need to connect Taylor Yard and Cornfield with other regional trail systems and the coast.

Section 31400.3 allows the Conservancy to provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies in establishing a system of public coastal accessways. Consistent with

this section, State Parks has requested Conservancy assistance in planning for regional trail linkages to the Los Angeles River Greenway and the California Coastal Trail.

Under Public Resources Code Section 33201(d) (a provision of the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy's enabling legislation, Division 23 of the Public Resources Code), the Coastal Conservancy does not have jurisdiction in the Santa Monica Mountains Zone outside the coastal zone portion of the Mountains Zone, as these terms are defined in Division 23. Section 33105 includes in the non-coastal portion of the Mountains Zone areas near the current planning sites, including Elysian Park and El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park. Also included in the Mountains Zone are any hiking and equestrian trail connections and accessways between Griffith Park, Elysian Park, and El Pueblo de Los Angeles. The planning sites are not within any of the named areas, and Coastal Conservancy staff is not aware of any trail connections and accessways that are planned or currently cross the presently urban, developed planning sites in question.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

Consistent with **Goal 1, Objective E**, the proposed authorization will lead to the development or improvement of regional trails and river parkways along the Los Angeles River which will connect inland populations to the coast.

Consistent with **Goal 2, Objective A**, the proposed authorization will result in the creation of new parks in areas of significant need.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective A**, the proposed authorization will result in the development of plans for the restoration of habitat in a coastal watershed and creation of river parkways to and along the Los Angeles River.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objective B**, the proposed authorization will lead to the development of projects that will improve water quality to benefit coastal resources.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes: See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.

Consistency with the purposes of the funding source: See the "Project Financing" section above.

Support of the public: Los Angeles is one of the most park-poor cities in the country. There is strong community support for the development of new parks. State Parks has

already initiated a public planning process for both Taylor Yard and the Cornfield that includes on-going public meetings. In addition, area legislators have been strong supporters of both projects.

Location: The project area is near and adjacent to the Los Angeles River; the watershed is a coastal watershed partly within and partly outside the coastal zone. Water quality benefits, as a result of the proposed project, will likely benefit coastal resources. The proposed project would also expand inland trail systems and linkages to the Los Angeles River greenway and the California Coastal Trail.

Need: State Parks has requested Conservancy assistance to help develop planning strategies for the two project sites. The Conservancy completed a study in 2002 looking at restoration feasibility alternatives for a portion of Taylor Yard.

Greater-than-local interest: Revitalization and greening of the Los Angeles River corridor is a major focus of the communities along the river, community groups, nonprofit organizations, and state and federal agencies. Taylor Yard and Cornfield will be very important components of the larger greenway that is taking shape along the river based on their size, historical significance to the City of Los Angeles and the region, possible mix of uses, and location near downtown Los Angeles.

Additional Criteria

Leverage: See the “Project Financing” section above.

Realization of prior Conservancy goals: See “Project History” above.

Cooperation: Cooperation among government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community groups has been an increasingly successful element of the planning process for Taylor Yard and Cornfield.

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project would be consistent with the planning and management policies contained in Section 30231 of the Public Resources Code, which states that “[t]he biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored. . .” The proposed authorization will include water quality improvement measures in the planning for the two sites. These water quality measures should improve the quality of coastal waters.

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed authorization involves only feasibility and planning for possible future actions and, thus, is statutorily exempt (14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262) from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378. The project is also categorically exempt under Section 15306 as it involves basic data collection, research, experimental management,

and resource evaluation, which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to environmental resources. Any projects later proposed for Conservancy authorization of funding for implementation will be evaluated as required by CEQA.

EXHIBIT 2

Letters of Support

Additional letters will be mailed separately and/or hand-carried to the meeting.